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Take a trip outside your own body

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Robert Monroe is not a travel director, but for $175 he offers to send you on the strangest trip of your life — a journey outside your own body. Monroe is the founding father of the Out of Body Experience (OBE), one of the more interesting phenomena in the world of parapsychology. The OBE is not as weird as it sounds. In fact, the conscious feeling of being separated from one's body is a rather common experience when one is on marijuana, laughing gas or LSD. The OBE could also be the prelude to life after death. Thus Monroe gives his OBE course to terminal patients. Monroe is currently putting 5,000 subjects through his OBE training program at his Institute of Applied Science in Afton, Va. If you've traveled out of your skin before, he'd like to hear from you.

Q. What happens to the body while you're out of it?

A. It's in a form of sleep, running on the autonomic nervous system. Depending upon the degree of the out-of-body state, the body is either breathing quite heavily or in a near comatose condition.

Q. The OBE sounds similar to dreaming when we feel we're in another place from our body.

A. A lot of dreaming actually is a distortion or a memory of an OBE. For example, a flying dream is often the conscious mind's interpretation of being in the out-of-body state, the non-physical state. Another instance is the falling dream. That's generally accepted as the re-entry into the physical body.

Q. Aren't OBE's often induced by substances like laughing gas, marijuana and hallucenogens?

A. Yes, but a chemically-triggered OBE is different from the kind we are researching. We deliberately stay away from drugs, chemicals, and electrical stimulation that tends to erode the consciousness that remains in the OBE. Sometimes we're hanging on by our fingernails out there, as it is. So why shave one off by taking drugs?

Q. What exactly is the purpose of your M-5000 course?

A. It's an experimental program. We're running through some 5,000 people to develop and evaluate a training system in order to understand, control and then utilize the basic bio-energy used to achieve the OBE. This energy comes in the form of a second body, that is, an intermediate mechanism by which the soul controls the physical body.

Q. Why do we need another body to explain the OBE?

A. Once one stayed away permanently from the physical body, that mechanism would more or less dissolve into the energy that you might label soul. The idea of a second body is common throughout history. Saints are often seen in their second bodies during apparitions. Ghosts are another example. The second body acts as a transformer of energy from the soul to the body. Frankly, I don't know why they exist.

Q. Does every human being have the capacity for an OBE?

A. No question about it. Virtually everyone moves into an OBE during sleep; they just don't remember it.

Q. What percentage of your experimentees actually undergo an OBE?

A. About 15 per cent. Like many other things, this requires a great deal of practice. We do have, on the other hand, a 100 per cent success factor in those that continue the exercises they have learned, but — it may take several years. It may take several weeks.

Q. How do you train people to have an OBE?

A. First of all, we teach people to put their physical body asleep while leaving the mind totally awake. Once the body is asleep and not interfering with the mind's activities, we instruct them how to actively utilize that mind. From then on it's a matter of practice. About two or three years ago our parent company obtained a patent on a technique for inducing sleep. It consists of a special type of audio pulsing which evokes a frequency-following response in the brain. We can drop people down to a borderland sleep state rather than deep delta sleep. We're able to help them stay at that stage, and remain conscious. That's where their body drops off to sleep and their mind stays awake — what we call "focus-10."

Q. Once I'm in "focus-10," can I jump in an OBE?

A. At "focus-10," you begin to perceive this new energy and the OBE is not far away. We are setting up a pathway by which you can go and return and feel totally comfortable within that path. We teach this on a step-by-step basis so that the fear of the unknown is not there.

Q. What determines where I go? Do I stay in New York or fly to California?

A. Most people go spontaneously, usually to someone they're attracted to — a relative or loved one. Some don't go anywhere. They just hover around in the vicinity and hop back in their physical bodies. Initially, it's under emotional control. You go to people more than places. People radiate a kind of signal, and you just head toward it.

Q. How do you know it's not just your imagination?

A. There's much too much hard data to prove it. We're not interested in big public demonstrations. We know and accept the OBE as a fact. There's no way that I know of, where you can be absolutely certain except by consciously experiencing it yourself. However, I have pinched a woman during an OBE when she was 200 miles away, left her with a black and blue mark.

Q. Does the OBE imply immortality?

A. That's probably one of the principal reasons we're developing simplified training systems for the OBE. Moving the second body in the OBE is the most effective way to demonstrate the reality of death. One can temporarily visit the energy system where you go after you die. We teach terminal cases how to go to establish a beachhead in this other dimension and then they lose their fear of death.

Q. How do we know that this is what occurs after death? Do we meet the spirits of dead people?

A. You can if you want. It happens. We have an explorer team which does that periodically just to sort of check in.

Robert Monroe